



OFFICE OF MISSOURI GOVERNOR

JAY NIXON

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Missouri Governor Jay Nixon's News Release

January 28, 2013

Gov. Nixon delivers 2013 State of the Address

Below is the text of the 2013 State of the State address, given tonight by **Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon** to a joint session of the Missouri General Assembly in Jefferson City:

Thank you, President Pro Tem Dempsey, Speaker Jones, judges of the Missouri Supreme Court, Lieutenant Governor Kinder, state officials, members of the legislature, members of my cabinet, and my fellow Missourians.

This evening it is my pleasure to be joined by Missouri's outstanding First Lady, Georganne Nixon, and our son Jeremiah.

Before I begin to lay out our state's agenda for the year, I would like to thank the people of Missouri for the privilege of serving a second term as Governor. I am grateful for your continued trust and support, and the opportunity to lead our great state forward.

Looking around this chamber tonight, I see folks with different backgrounds, different ideologies, and different interests.

But whatever our small differences may be, we are united in a common purpose: to serve all the people of Missouri... to make their lives better... and to make life better for our children and grandchildren.

These past four years, Missouri has weathered historic challenges - from nearly double-digit unemployment to the tornado in Joplin.

But together, we met each challenge with courage and conviction, and moved our state forward.

That makes me proud to be a Missourian.

That makes me more optimistic than ever about our future.

Because the people of the Show-Me State know how to work together. And once our minds are made up, nothing can stop us.

That's who we are. That's what we do.

Some who answer the call of service put their lives at risk to protect the lives of others.

They serve here at home whenever danger and disaster threaten. They serve in perilous outposts in every corner of the globe, to defend our freedom and liberty.

We call them heroes. They make us proud.

Last December, I again had the opportunity to visit our troops in Afghanistan and Kuwait.

One of them is with us tonight.

Sergeant Joseph Schicker served with the Guard's Agribusiness Development Team in Afghanistan. Just hours after his team arrived at their base, Taliban insurgents attacked.

In successfully repelling the attack, several Missouri Guardsmen, including Sergeant Schicker, were wounded. For his part in the battle, Sergeant Schicker received the Combat Infantry Badge and the Army Commendation Medal with Valor.

I personally had the honor of pinning Sergeant Schicker with the Purple Heart during the ADT's welcome home ceremony in September.

Sergeant Schicker, you represent every man and every woman who has ever fought to defend our great nation, in every era and on every field of battle.

Will you please stand, with all the members of our military past and present, and accept the heartfelt



Gov. Nixon delivers 2013 State of the State address.

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gratitude of your state?

In the last four years, we've overcome our share of challenges.

Missouri was hit by unprecedented natural disasters.

We came together to help our neighbors hit hard by twisters and ice storms, floods and drought.

In the grip of an historic recession, we did what every family in Missouri did: we tightened our belts and cut spending.

Together, we balanced the budget while holding the line on taxes.

We dramatically reduced the size of state government, while making it more efficient.

We protected our spotless Triple-A credit rating. And unlike most states, we did it without reaching into taxpayers' wallets, or putting it on the credit card.

And you know what? It worked.

And as a result, our economy is moving forward.

Last year, Missouri employers added more than 40,000 new jobs.

We're exporting more goods than ever before...training more workers than ever before...

and bringing Missouri's auto industry back to life.

Two weeks ago - on the day after my inauguration - I went back to Detroit to meet with auto suppliers and manufacturers.

We got our first good look at the Ford Transit, one of the fantastic new vehicles we're going to build right here in the Show-Me State.

A top Ford exec said that if we hadn't come together during that special session two years ago, the Claycomo plant would have closed. That would have put those 4,000 workers out of a job, and pushed Missouri's auto industry to the brink.

Instead?

Automakers are investing more than \$1.5 billion in Missouri, creating thousands of jobs at the Ford plant in Claycomo, the GM plant in Wentzville, and suppliers in every corner of our state. By coming together in that special session, we saved Missouri's auto industry.

So when the skeptics say that nothing gets done in this building, or when the press writes that the two parties can't come together, think of those workers and their families. And remember that what we do here really matters.

And that same spirit is needed now more than ever, to keep Missouri moving forward.

Together, we've kept our fiscal discipline, and our economy is gaining ground.

We now have a unique opportunity to build a better future for our children. We must seize it.

And nothing will have a greater impact on our children's future than the commitment we make now to their education.

So in my budget, we increase funding for education. And we increase it by \$150 million.

- That's \$17 million more for early childhood education.
- That's \$34 million more for higher education;
- And that's \$100 million more for our K-12 classrooms.

Our children are our first priority. They are Missouri's future.

Of course, with increased funding, come higher expectations. We expect better test scores, better graduation rates, more college degrees and more Missourians ready to compete for the best jobs in a global economy.

We've all got to do better, and that means everybody: students and teachers; parents and principals; coaches and college presidents. Increased funding means increased accountability.

We know the early years of a child's life are critical. Over the past few weeks I've visited preschool classrooms in Greenville, Nixa, Parkway and St. Joseph - local communities committed to giving their kids a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

And the first official business of my second term was to meet with leaders in preschool education. We discussed ways to ensure that every young child comes to school ready to learn, and ready to succeed.

The clear consensus: early childhood education is a smart investment, with a big return.

We want every child, in every Missouri community - no matter their family's circumstances - to get the best possible start.

That is why, with an increase of \$17 million, we'll more than double funding for our Missouri Preschool Program, and put more money into programs like Early Head Start.

Tonight, we are fortunate to be joined by the St. Louis Pre-School Teacher of the Year, Linda Smith, of Dewey International School. Joining her is St. Louis Public Schools Superintendent, Dr. Kelvin Adams.

Under Dr. Adams' strong leadership, the St. Louis schools have made steady progress over the past five years, as they work to earn full accreditation. That kind of progress is only possible when everyone pulls together toward a shared goal.

Mrs. Smith and Dr. Adams, please stand. Thank you for the lifelong commitment you've made to our children.

In the past four years, our schools have made steady gains.

Math scores are up. Reading scores are up.

And I'm proud to report that Missouri's high school graduation rate is now the seventh-highest in the nation.

But we must commit to even higher goals.

That's why my budget includes \$100 million in new funding for our K-12 classrooms.

We'll use it to train more teachers, modernize equipment, and lengthen the school year.

Right now, Missouri has the fourth-shortest school year in the nation. Adding six more days to the next school year will give teachers more time to work with their students, and give kids more time to learn.

But we won't stop at K-12. This year, we'll help even more Missouri families afford college. That's been a top priority of mine since Day One.

On my watch, we led the nation in holding down the cost of tuition. But the cost of college is still out of reach for too many Missouri families. And too many students who do attend college graduate with crushing debt.

That's why my budget includes more than \$75 million for our Access and Bright Flight scholarships. And it increases funding for our A+ scholarships, which cover tuition and fees at all our public community colleges.

To qualify for an A+ scholarship, high school students must keep their grades up, have excellent attendance, and stay out of trouble.

Since I've been Governor, we've expanded the A+ program to 150 more schools. But there are still schools that aren't part of the A+ program, so their students can't even apply for A+ scholarships.

That's unfair to these kids, and we're going to fix it. This is the year we will expand our A+ scholarship program to every public high school in the state, so that every qualified student in this state has the opportunity to go to community college - tuition free.

The dream of a college education should be within reach for all Missouri families. Because education is the best economic development tool there is.

While our colleges and universities are doing a great job, and graduating more students than ever before, we're also holding these schools to higher standards than ever before.

Two years ago, I convened a summit to lay out my agenda for higher education. I challenged the leaders of all our public two- and four-year institutions to develop a new funding model - based on performance. And that's what we did.

My budget includes an increase of \$34 million for higher education. But instead of funding schools based merely on what they've received in the past, we'll tie new funding to specific performance goals - like increased student retention, higher graduation rates and improved learning.

We will achieve higher academic goals - with greater accountability.

Now, we've made it our mission to help more high school students graduate, go to college, complete their degrees and enter the workforce.

That's the traditional path. And I'm glad more students are taking it. But there are nearly 750,000 Missourians who started college but never completed their degrees. They left school, got jobs, started families, moved on with their lives.

At this point, some of these folks may feel that going back to college is too expensive, or too hard to juggle with work and raising kids.

I want to change that and help these adult students finish the degrees they started years ago, so they can get better jobs and meet their full earning potential.

This year, we'll do more to help these adult students finish their degrees online, from an accredited university that's putting down new roots in Missouri. Let me tell you about its history.

In 1995, 19 governors came together to provide a realistic option to help adult students complete their degrees at an affordable price. They founded Western Governors University, a nonprofit institution that offers bachelors and masters degrees in four areas Missouri's employers are looking for: business, health care, teacher preparation and information technology.

It's designed to meet the needs of real people with real lives. You can take your tests after work, on weekends or at night, after the kids are asleep. Instead of paying tuition by the credit hour, students can take as much coursework as they want for a flat rate. And how quickly you earn your degree depends on how quickly you master the subject matter: you advance at your own pace.

The point is that with today's technology, we can make it easier than ever for folks to finish their degrees without disrupting their lives, and help them move up the economic ladder.

In the past three years, Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, and the states of Texas and Washington have established WGU in their states. And starting this year, we will begin enrolling students at WGU-Missouri.

We'll be helping Missourians who never finished college, who are underemployed and who need degrees to move up, reach their full potential. Now that's a mission we can all get behind.

Throughout state government, we've applied business principles to make the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars. Cutting waste. Doing more with less. Making better use of technology.

And as a result, the state workforce is now the smallest it has been in 19 years. From the time I became Governor to the end of Fiscal Year 2014, we will have reduced the size of state government by 4,500 positions, and cut \$1.8 billion in state spending.

We've sharply cut energy use, sold off surplus property and reduced leased space.

We've put more state services online - from license plates to child support.

And in addition to applying business principles to make state government more efficient, we must use those same principles to make government more business friendly.

Now, Missouri's already rated one of the Top-Ten best states to do business, because of things like our low tax rates, low workers comp rates, low energy costs and strong workforce. But talk to small business owners and they'll tell you: there's still too much red tape. Too many bureaucratic hurdles. We hear those concerns, and we're doing something about it.

First, we need to streamline Missouri's economic incentive programs - and there are a lot of them - so that they're easier to use and understand.

Second, we need to simplify our convoluted environmental permitting process. Currently, business owners have to go to as many as six commissions at the Department of Natural Resources to get permits. And that's before they turn the first shovel of dirt. We need to consolidate those commissions into one, to help businesses grow and create jobs.

And while we're at it, I propose that we eliminate another ten commissions at DNR that are redundant and unnecessary. We can take common-sense steps to cut red tape for businesses - without backing off our commitment to protecting our air, land and water.

We also must address the Second Injury Fund.

This year, let's work together and solve this issue for the benefit of Missouri workers and employers.

In a highly competitive global economy, employers need access to a highly skilled, well-trained workforce. That's why I've made it a top priority to give Missouri workers the skills they need to compete for the jobs of tomorrow.

Since I've been in office, we've dramatically increased our investment in worker training, helping 150,000 Missouri workers sharpen their skills and get better jobs in their field. So once again, my budget increases funding for workforce training that's custom-tailored to the needs of Missouri employers.

Investing in Missouri workers' skills - that's real economic development. But job training doesn't just happen in the classroom or on the work site. Some of Missouri's best workers got their training serving us in the armed forces.

Helping our veterans get work when they come home is not only honorable and patriotic, it's good for Missouri businesses. If you're looking for an employee who shows up early, stays late, works hard all day and knows how to overcome adversity - hire a veteran.

In 2010, we launched Show-Me Heroes. We've asked every employer in the state to reach out, recruit and interview veterans first for new job openings.

I'd like to thank all the legislators in this room who helped us strengthen this program by adding job training, so our veterans can re-enter the civilian workforce quickly and be even more successful on the job.

More than 2,700 employers have signed the Show-Me Heroes pledge, putting more than 4,000 of our proud Missouri veterans to work.

And tonight, again, I call on every Missouri business to go to our website - MO.gov - and take the Show-Me Heroes pledge.

Because it's not enough to honor and support our service members abroad. We must honor and support them at home, with jobs that are worthy of their skills and work ethic.

For the third straight year, I am proud to report that we are shipping more Missouri goods around the world than ever before.

Missouri exports hit record levels in 2010, and topped the \$14 billion mark with double-digit growth in 2011. And we're on track to break records again. That's because we're taking a pro-active approach.

In October of 2011, I led a group of Missouri business leaders on a highly successful trade mission to China. We secured agreements to sell \$4.6 billion in Missouri goods.

In April of 2012, we went to Brazil, and signed our first-ever trade agreement with the state of Sao Paulo, the financial capital of one of the world's fastest-growing economies. And this coming March, I will lead a trade mission to South Korea and Taiwan.

We're making this a priority because it's critical for every business in the state - no matter how small - to think globally. Because companies that once only did business with customers around the corner are finding new customers around the world. And when we sell more Missouri products overseas, we're creating more jobs here at home.

That's why my budget includes \$2.3 million to enter new markets, expand foreign trade, and help Missouri businesses develop a world-wide customer base.

One of our export superstars comes from one of Missouri's oldest family-owned businesses, Volpi Foods in St. Louis. Next time you are in St. Louis, stop by their shop on The Hill.

Volpi is a prime example of a traditional business that with visionary new leadership has broken the mold. With the help of our departments of Agriculture and Economic Development, Volpi has doubled its exports in growing markets like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Costa Rica.

Please welcome the CEO of Volpi Foods, Lorenza Pasetti.

There's no doubt that Missouri is ready to meet the challenges of a global economy.

But quite frankly, the biggest economic decision facing our state right now is how to move forward on health care.

This isn't the time to re-open the debate or reargue the merits of the President's health care plan. I had some problems with it, and I know many of you did as well. But Congress passed it - the President signed it - and the Supreme Court upheld it.

It's the law of the land. And it's not within our power to rewrite federal laws, even if we wanted to.

It is within our power - it's our responsibility - to now do what's right for Missouri.

And the question before us is a narrow one. Will we bring the tax-dollars that Missourians send to Washington back home to strengthen our Medicaid system here in Missouri?

Or will we let the tax dollars that Missourians send to Washington be spent in other states instead? Other states would get the benefits, and we'd get the bill.

The answer is clear: the people of Missouri deserve to see their tax-dollars come back to their communities.

Friends, let's put the politics of health care aside for just a moment and look at this as a business decision for the state of Missouri.

The Missouri Chamber of Commerce supports the Medicaid expansion - not because they're big supporters of this President and his agenda - but because it's the smart thing to do. They know that bringing billions of dollars back to Missouri is good for our state's economy.

The Kansas City Chamber of Commerce has endorsed the Medicaid expansion. So have the chambers in Independence, Springfield, Lee's Summit and St. Louis. So have the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City, Kirksville REDl, and our friends at the Associated Industries of Missouri.

Would the leaders from these business organizations who have joined us tonight because of the importance of this issue please stand? Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

For these business leaders, this is not a political decision. It's an economic one. And we shouldn't let last year's politics get in the way of next year's economic growth.

Moving forward with this plan will bring a total of \$5.7 billion to Missouri for the first three calendar years - at no additional cost to the state.

The University of Missouri estimates this will generate an additional 24,000 jobs - and that's just in 2014. We're talking about good jobs - for nurses, doctors, pharmacists, therapists and medical technicians.

Strengthening Medicaid will strengthen our economy. Without question, it's the smart thing to do.

Now I know there are some who have voiced concern that Washington will not live up to its commitment. Let me address that directly: I support including a provision that rolls back the Medicaid expansion if Washington doesn't honor its financial commitment.

If Washington drops the ball, we'll do what's right for Missouri. We'll always do what's right for Missouri.

And there's a human element to this that can't be ignored.

A stronger Medicaid system will make health care available to 300,000 of our friends and neighbors.

Let's be clear about who these people are. They're working Missourians - folks who work day and night, but

simply can't afford health coverage.

These are not people who aren't trying, or hoping to game the system. They're folks we see every day - some holding down two jobs just to make ends meet.

We're talking about a family of four, with a household income of roughly \$32,000 a year. They wait tables and clean office buildings. They cut hair and trim trees. They work in factories, and repair cars and trucks.

Making it easier for these hardworking Missourians to get basic health insurance is the right thing to do. And because these folks can't afford doctors' bills or insurance, they often end up in our hospital emergency rooms, because it's the only option for their family. In their shoes, you'd probably do the same thing.

It's a terrible way to deliver health care. It drives up premiums for people who do have health insurance. That must change.

I'm well aware this is a tough issue politically. But across the country, we're seeing Governors and state legislators put politics aside to do what's undeniably best for their states.

Republican Governors in places like Arizona, North Dakota, New Mexico and Nevada are using federal funds to strengthen their Medicaid systems. Not because it's the easy thing for them to do politically, but because it's the right thing to do.

Here in Missouri, we must make the smart business decision. The right human decision. And bring the tax dollars we send to Washington back to work here in Missouri.

On another health care front, in recent years we have seen the tragic consequences when people with serious mental illness don't get the help they need.

Right now, many people with severe mental illness only get treatment when they reach a crisis point. That's too late.

My budget includes \$10 million to help those with mental illness get timely, effective treatment in their own communities. That money will be used to:

- Provide more services in our community mental health centers;
- Increase mental health first-aid training for professionals so they can recognize the early warning signs of mental illness.
- Train law enforcement in mental health crisis-intervention;
- And teach families how to care for loved ones who suffer from severe mental illness.

We must do everything in our power to get folks the treatment they need, before it's too late.

Each day in our state and across the country, tragedies occur that don't make headlines, and often don't get reported at all. I am talking about domestic violence.

Last year, our network of shelters for victims of domestic violence provided safe haven for thousands of women and children. But thousands of others were turned away because the shelters were full.

We know that battered women are at greatest risk when they make the courageous decision to leave an abusive partner. Finding shelter can literally make the difference between life and death for these women and for their children.

That is why my budget includes a 29 percent increase in funds to provide more beds, more treatment, more safety at domestic violence shelters throughout our state. No child - no mother - who has been the victim of domestic violence should ever be turned away and left to fend for themselves during these moments of crisis.

These past four years, we have opened new doors for thousands of Missourians with disabilities.

I'm passionate about this work, as I know many of you in this room are as well. Together, we passed landmark legislation in 2010 to ensure that children with autism get the medical care they need.

Issues like this transcend politics. And now thousands of youngsters are getting the therapy that, just a couple years ago, their families couldn't afford. We will keep moving forward by funding training for more therapists to help even more children with autism lead happier, healthier lives.

In October of 2010, we started the Partnership for Hope. And it's already helped thousands of people with developmental disabilities live fuller lives. My budget includes funds to expand this vital program to 1,000 more Missourians, some of whom have spent years waiting for services.

By the end of 2014, we'll be serving more than 3,500 people with developmental disabilities.

Missourians like Vishal Patel. Vishal is 23. He has a rare form of cerebral palsy, and gets around in a motorized wheelchair.

For years Vishal had to crawl, or have his parents carry him upstairs in their home, to take a shower. The Partnership for Hope provided Vishal with a stair lift, a roll-in shower, a permanent ramp and the physical therapy he needs.

But as he told me in a letter, his real dream was to get a real job - with a real paycheck.

The Partnership arranged for him to volunteer every Friday at a movie theater in St. Peters. And Vishal did so well, that just before Christmas they offered him that real job, with a real paycheck. His first day was January 4th.

Vishal represents the many Missourians with disabilities who are now entering the workforce, thanks to the Partnership for Hope and the enlightened business owners who recognize the value of these outstanding workers.

Vishal is here tonight with his job coach, Pam Westhoff, and Peg Capo, who runs the program in St. Charles County. Please welcome the newest member of Missouri's workforce, Vishal Patel.

At the start of my speech, I spoke about unique opportunities, and the importance of seizing them.

With our perfect Triple-A credit rating intact and interest rates at all-time lows, we now have a unique opportunity to move forward with a bond issuance.

It would allow us to modernize our K-12 classrooms and college research labs, mental hospitals and state parks. Some of our state's most important buildings need long-overdue improvements, including this one.

Interest rates today are about half of what they were in 1995 when Governor Carnahan issued bonds, and about a third of what they were when Governor Bond did the same in 1983, when interest rates were more than 8 percent.

But the bond issue must be focused on our state's most pressing needs. And we must have a way to pay for it.

When we talk about our state's long-term needs, nothing is more important than our schools.

A bond issuance will allow the state to establish a permanent, low-interest loan fund dedicated to improving our local schools.

Which is why I am proposing the creation of the BOOST Fund. BOOST stands for Building Opportunities in Our Schools Today.

Because, folks, let's not kid ourselves. If we want our children to get a first-rate education and compete in a 21st Century global economy, they'll need first-rate, 21st Century facilities: state-of-the-art computers and science labs, libraries and wired classrooms. The BOOST Fund will go to work in your communities, in schools in every corner of Missouri.

In addition, a targeted bond issuance will provide funds for cutting-edge university research facilities in areas critical to our competitiveness, such as engineering, math, and science.

Bond proceeds will also allow us to build a new and improved Fulton State Mental Hospital. We have a moral responsibility to these patients and their caregivers to provide the best possible environment: one that is safe, secure and conducive to healing.

Bonds will also pay to upgrade accommodations in our state parks. It's an investment that will have a big impact on tourism.

And tourism is big business in Missouri. Last year, Missouri welcomed 36 million visitors, pumping nearly \$11 billion into our state's economy. But we can do even better.

Updating our cabins and lodges, and building brand-new, top-of-the-line facilities at our most popular parks will create jobs, help our economy, and make our parks an even bigger draw. Our 87 state parks and historic sites are a priceless legacy that belongs to all of us. Hunting, fishing, hiking and camping are part of our Missouri way of life.

Investing in Missouri's state parks today will help preserve our outdoor heritage for our grandchildren, and their grandchildren.

As I said before, we can only move forward with a bond issuance if we have a way to pay for it.

Saying "we'll figure it out later" won't work. That's not how we became a Triple-A state.

The way to pay for the bond issuance is to finally get our tax credit system under control.

We've worked on reining in tax credits for years. In 2010, I appointed a statewide, bipartisan, tax credit commission to study the issue.

That commission tapped the expertise of Missouri leaders in business, education, labor and government. They recommended a series of pragmatic, fiscally responsible reforms to rein in tax credit expenditures and ensure these programs provide a strong return on taxpayers' investment.

But two years later, these reforms have yet to pass, and the costs of inaction continue to grow.

Last year tax credit redemptions grew to a staggering \$629 million - one-twelfth of our entire general revenue budget. That's not fiscally responsible.

This is the year to get comprehensive, fiscally responsible tax credit reform legislation to my desk, and get smart, strategic investments in our state moving forward.

But all of the ideas and proposals I outlined tonight mean very little if the people of Missouri lose faith in the system.

Missouri's ethics laws are among the weakest in the nation. Every year as Governor, I've put forward my agenda for ethics reform, and I know many of you have made genuine efforts to pass legislation.

The list of reforms we must implement is long. Everything from curbing committee-to-committee transfers to banning office holders from doubling as paid political consultants to finally closing the revolving door between the legislature and lobbyists. All things we must do.

But above all, the single most destructive force to our system is the unlimited sums of money pouring into the campaign accounts of candidates seeking public office.

We must institute - we must re-institute - strict campaign contribution limits.

Each time a wealthy individual or business or special interest sends a check for \$20,000 or \$50,000 or \$100,000 to a candidate, the public's trust erodes a little bit more. And eventually, if we continue on this path, there will be no trust left at all.

I've led the fight for campaign contribution limits for many years. As Attorney General, I stood before the U.S. Supreme Court and successfully argued in support of Missouri's contribution limits. And as Governor, I stood before you every year and made the case for them.

This year, if the Legislature does not send a campaign contribution limit bill to my desk, I will do everything in my power to get it on the ballot and make sure it passes.

The people of Missouri have voiced their opinion on this matter already at the ballot box and their support for contribution limits was overwhelming. We all know it would pass once again.

Let's work together and get it done this session. The era of unlimited contributions to candidates must end.

These past four years, we've been faced with some historic challenges.

And by working together, we've tackled them head-on ...and made great strides in the Show-Me State.

We've kept our fiscal discipline, balanced the budget and put strict cost controls in place throughout state government. And as a result, our economy is making solid, steady progress.

The signs are everywhere. Businesses large and small are hiring again.

Missouri's unemployment rate has been lower than the national average for 40 consecutive months.

New building permits are up. Personal income is up, and wages are up.

And now we are in a position to make smart, long-term investments that will boost our children's academic achievement, protect Missourians' health, strengthen our workforce, improve our quality of life and create prosperity for generations to come.

We have unique opportunities before us. Now is the time to seize them.

Just two weeks ago, I stood at the steps of this Capitol, and spoke of my vision for the future of our beloved state:

A future where all our children get an education that prepares them to compete for the best jobs in the global economy;

Where the brightest minds in science and technology advance the frontiers of human knowledge;

Where business and the arts flourish;

Where the bounty of Missouri's farms and fields will feed, clothe and power the planet;

And where the natural beauty of our state is preserved and cherished for all time.

That future is ours to build. And we can only do it by working together.

When I first came to the Capitol in 1987, I was the youngest person in the Senate. I had a lot to learn. And I was fortunate to serve with many dedicated and capable legislators on both sides of the aisle. They showed me what public service is and what it requires of each of us.

Republicans and Democrats didn't agree on everything back then, just like they don't now.

We had a divided state government, with a Governor of one party, and the other party holding a large majority in the legislature - just like we do now.

But we worked together to get things done for the good of the people.

I've been in public service for a long time. More than a quarter of a century.

And in those many years, my faith in the people of Missouri has never faltered. My faith in our bedrock values has never wavered.

And I have always been mindful of, and inspired by, the words inscribed on the Great Seal of Missouri, on our flag and in these marble halls:

"Let the Good of the People Be the Supreme Law."

This is our call to action, our common oath and rallying cry. This is our sworn duty.

Ours is a sacred calling. Our time is short.

Let every action we take in these halls and in the offices of government be guided by that supreme law: the good of the people.

Now let us seek God's everlasting grace and protection to finish the good works He has entrusted to our care.

God bless Missouri.

And God bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

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